

Urban Reforms, Cultural Goods and the Valongo Wharf Circle: Understanding Intervention in Rio de Janeiro's Port Area

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Between 2012 and 2016, the Valongo Wharf Circle employed capoeira to make sense of the complex and enduring legacies of the Valongo Wharf, namely, the impact and intersection of racial discrimination and cycles of redevelopment that have remade Rio and marked the history of the site. This article uses 'products' that record the project to consider the vicissitudes and contingency of how it both used and reconfigured the selective valorisation of the everyday to probe and disrupt the quotidian dynamics of Rio's port area.

Keywords: Afro-Brazilian culture, capoeira, city, pleasure, Rio de Janeiro, urban reforms.

The fenced-off paving stones that comprise Valongo Wharf today provide little sense that this corner of Rio de Janeiro's port area has long served as a dynamic site of racialised and exclusionary capital accumulation. Limited signage explains that the wharf is a former slave port that was twice buried and renamed before being rediscovered in 2009. It also reveals the wharf is recognised as cultural heritage by Rio's city hall and as world heritage by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It offers scant indication, however, of the complex legacies of the Valongo Wharf's slaving past both in Rio and in Brazil more generally. It is precisely this history that the Roda do Cais do Valongo (Valongo Wharf Circle), which is examined in this article, sought to make palpable, once a month, on Saturday mornings, between 2012 and 2016. This event was initially conceived as a capoeira circle:

an Afro-Brazilian cultural practice – simultaneously a fight and a dance – that can be interpreted as a tradition, a sport and even an art form. Capoeira players form a circle at the centre of which two players engage with one another. [...] The other players around the circle sing, chant, clap and play percussive instruments. (UNESCO, 2014)

Mestre Carlão, or Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, a master of Capoeira Angola, widely regarded as the purest and most traditional style of capoeira (Vassallo, 2008), and the event's organiser, noted, however, that 'the circle always opened, from the beginning,

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from the first circle, with a speech. It was a spontaneous idea and I started speaking in the first circle' (interview with Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, 2020). This initial improvisation shaped the structure of subsequent events that, for four years, took place in the morning of every third Saturday in the month. An invited representative, teacher or researcher of Afro-Brazilian traditions in Rio, always opened the monthly event with a talk, or 'Knowledge Circle'. A capoeira circle followed this discussion. Sometimes, a 'Technique Circle', a workshop on a cultural practice, or a film, was inserted between the two.

All the Valongo Wharf Circle's activities, as their names indicate, took place in a circular format to reflect how capoeira is practised. The monthly event could not take place on the Valongo Wharf itself, as it is fenced off to prevent visitors from walking on it or engaging with it physically. Instead, in order for the participants to remain cool, the area of shade nearest to the wharf dictated its location. A free event, the Valongo Wharf Circle brought together prominent capoeira masters and their students, who mostly practised Capoeira Angola. Its Knowledge Circles also attracted researchers and members of the wider public. Indeed, between 2012 and 2015, a year before the events ended, it is estimated that approximately 30 events had been held and that more than 3000 people had participated in them (Teobaldo, 2015: 15).

Mestre Carlão noted that as the events progressed, he began to reflect on the value of the Knowledge Circles delivered, the photographs taken by Maria Buzanovsky and the videos recorded by Guilherme Begué of the events:

there were three types of activities that took place in the circle, apart from capoeira itself, that were already happening and that naturally made me think about transforming this into a product [...] into three products: a book, a film and a photo exhibition. (Interview, Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, 2020)

These were produced using funds from the 'Marvellous Port Cultural Prize', awarded to the Valongo Wharf Circle by Rio's City Hall and the Urban Development Company of Rio de Janeiro's Port Region. The prize was related to an urban redevelopment project entitled 'Marvellous Port', which I explore shortly. The book, entitled *Roda dos Saberes do Cais do Valongo* (Valongo Wharf Knowledge Circles) (Teobaldo, 2015), transforms the Knowledge Circles given in the port area into short texts and is illustrated by Buzanovsky's photographs. The film consists of extracts from interviews with speakers at the Knowledge Circles and the photo exhibition of Buzanovsky's work. All three 'products' were intended as tools to facilitate the fulfilment of law 11,645/2008 (Presidência da República, 2003) that requires that Afro-Brazilian history and culture are taught in primary and secondary schools, part of a broader provision of affirmative actions for Afro-Brazilians introduced in Brazil in recent decades. The photo exhibition has travelled round schools and public squares. The book was distributed to teachers in schools and universities and capoeira *mestres* 'not just from Brazil, but the whole world' and the film is freely available online (interview with Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, 2020).

As the Valongo Wharf Circle's monthly events ceased in 2016, this article offers a close reading of the abovementioned book, supplemented by interviews conducted with Mestre Carlão between 2015 and 2020, to consider how the project was imbricated and intervened in processes shaping Rio's port area. The contents of the book provide carefully edited windows onto the Valongo Wharf Circle's monthly events. The thirteen Knowledge Circles recorded in the book address a breadth of topics that illuminate the history and legacy of Valongo Wharf including: the development and celebration

of networks of Afro-descendent sociability and support in Rio, endeavours to have Afro-Brazilian memory and heritage officially recognised, and attempts to develop a truly public art. Considering space and because each Knowledge Circle performs unique work, I focus on just two: one that reflects on the past and one that maps Rio's present, together with their relation to the broader corpus.

This article considers how the Valongo Wharf Circle used capoeira to examine the complex and enduring legacies of Valongo Wharf, namely the impact and intersection of racial discrimination and cycles of redevelopment that have remade Rio and its port area. Since the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, a series of foreign-inspired redevelopment projects have sought to remake Rio in a modern image by equipping it for modern commerce and opening it up to flows of capital and goods. Nonetheless, as addressed shortly, the question of what to do with the city's former slaves and their descendants has remained a source of anxiety for Rio's elites.

The original slaving docks that comprise Valongo Wharf were built over during urban reforms in 1843 and 1904, before being uncovered in 2011 during works related to the Marvellous Port project, begun in 2009, that redeveloped Rio's port area prior to its hosting of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. As during previous cycles of redevelopment in the area, the justifications for this recent project and the displacements it has occasioned have been interrogated and contested by residents and activists. Unlike in previous reforms, however, the selective valorisation of the past and construction of heritage was a key axis of both the Marvellous Port project and critical responses to it, including that offered by the Valongo Wharf Circle.

The work of John Collins (2015) and José Reginaldo Santos Gonçalves (2007) explore how, since the 1970s, select everyday practices have been elevated to the status of Brazilian national heritage and reified as cultural goods to stimulate economic development. This article draws upon Elizabeth Povinelli's (2011: 8) understanding of social projects as practices that 'disaggregate aspects of the social worlds and aggregate individual projects into a more or less whole – a definable and describable thing' to consider the vicissitudes and contingency of how the Valongo Wharf Circle both used and reconfigured the selective valorisation of the everyday to probe and disrupt the quotidian dynamics of Rio's port area.

Little Africa

To aid my analysis, I briefly chart the history of Rio's port area. The first use of the term 'Pequena África' (Little Africa) to describe the region is attributed to Heitor dos Prazeres (1898–1966), a samba composer, singer, handyman, and self-taught painter born in the port area. Central to this characterisation is Rio's status, from the eighteenth century onwards, as an important slaving port. Enslaved Africans initially disembarked at Praça XV (XV Square), a square located in Rio's centre. Then, as the city grew throughout the eighteenth century, to disguise the horrors of the Middle Passage, authorities mandated that slaving ships should dock at the more distant Valongo Wharf, located in Rio's present-day port area (Figure 1). From 1774 to 1831, when the slave trade was abolished in Brazil, hundreds of thousands of slaves docked at the Valongo Wharf, around which complexes of trading houses and slave markets proliferated.

Urban Reforms, Cultural Goods and the Valongo Wharf Circle

Figure 1. Map of Rio's Port Area (Neighbourhoods of Saúde, Gamboa and Santo Cristo), Centre and New City.



Source: Designed by Philip Stickler

Many survivors of the Middle Passage were destined for plantation slavery. A significant proportion, however, remained in Rio. The ubiquity of these urban slaves left an indelible mark on the city's culture. James Sweet (2003) examines how enslaved populations in colonial Brazil maintained African forms of kinship formation, child-rearing practices, language, religion and healing practices.

Capoeira is a key example of such cultural movement and adaptation. Carlos Eugênio Líbano Soares (1998: vii) describes the practice as 'one of the most important manifestations of slave culture in the urban environment', characterised by 'a mixture of martial blows and skilful handling of knives'. The practice formed part of daily life in colonial and imperial Rio as both game and means of combat. This culminated in the formation of *malts*, or capoeira gangs, around fountains that were key resources and sites of slave sociability in nineteenth-century Rio. Both Soares (1997) and Luiz Sergio Dias (2001) highlight how, in the second half of the nineteenth century, waves of European immigration to Rio, particularly from Portugal, brought new adepts to the practice, including the sons of elite families. From then onwards, capoeira ceased to be the preserve of Rio's Afro-descendent population.

Capoeira was nonetheless widely feared. Soares and Matthias Röhrig Assunção (2005) explore how throughout the nineteenth century various attempts were made to

regulate the practice. Following the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), the transfer of the Portuguese court to Rio in 1808, and the Malê Revolt in Bahia in 1835, capoeira's association with Rio's highly visible and mobile slave population led those 'in charge of the city's security to become increasingly concerned about the subversive potential of "playing capoeira"', especially as it was not regarded as a productive activity for slaves or workers (Assunção, 2005: 72). Rio's then young police force consequently attempted to curb its practice. Adepts of capoeira, nonetheless, also worked in the police force and army, and politicians employed *malts* as strong men.

Following the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, waves of migration of former slaves from both the city's rural hinterlands and Brazil's drought-prone, north-eastern states renewed Rio's Afro-Brazilian population. Rio's population grew from 522,561 in 1890 to 811,433 in 1905 as a result of European immigration and internal migration (Moura, 1995: 42–43). These migrants occupied buildings in Rio's centre (Figure 1), left empty by the wealthy who had moved to more prestigious lodgings on the city's hills. It was in and around these houses in central Rio that popular practices such as capoeira, candomblé (an Afro-Brazilian fetish-based religion), and samba (an Afro-Brazilian musical genre) flourished.

Cycles of Redevelopment in Rio de Janeiro's Port Area

Following the proclamation of the First Brazilian Republic in 1889, Brazil's elites feverishly attempted to present the country and its then capital, Rio, as modern and republican. Between 1903 and 1906, Rio's then mayor, Francisco Pereira Passos (1836–1913), implemented Haussmann-inspired, modernising reforms to transform the city's winding colonial architecture into a tropical Paris, then regarded as the vanguard of both modernity and republicanism. Not solely aesthetic, however, these reforms sought to attract and facilitate the flow of capital to and through Rio at a time when its elites were embracing economic liberalism. The modernisation of Rio's port infrastructure and erection of wide, elegant boulevards, funded by British capital, sought to project a positive image of Rio abroad to invite foreign capital investment, allow the imported European luxury goods coveted by Rio's elites to reach stores with ease, and provide an enticing Parisian experience to shoppers (Needell, 1987; Sevcenko, 2003).

Motivated by racialised anxiety, these reforms also served a social function. Rio's elites regarded the city's large non-white population as backwards, degenerate and an impediment to the construction of a new Rio. As Fabiola López-Durán (2018) notes, drawing upon the thinking of Lamarckian eugenics which held that characteristics acquired during a person's lifetime from their environment and lifestyle could be genetically transmitted to their children, these reforms sought to hygienise Rio's urban environment and modernise its population. Popular housing in the city centre was regarded by Rio's elites as unsanitary and, therefore, a source of physical and moral degeneracy; it was therefore demolished and its lower-class and Afro-Brazilian inhabitants expelled to Rio's growing peripheries.

These expulsions were accompanied by a strict penal code, introduced in 1890. It attempted to prevent insalubrious conditions in the centre of Rio by managing and restricting the movement and behaviour of the city's popular classes and intensified the existing criminalisation of many of their practices, including capoeira, under the rubric of idleness and vagrancy. The penal code extirpated Rio's *malts* and curbed

the practice of capoeira in the city, implemented as it was by a new republican government that regarded them as ‘everything that was rotten in the political system of the Empire: violence, corruption and backwardness’ (Assunção, 2005: 94). The wide avenues erected in the city centre were also intended to thwart the popular uprisings that frequently obstructed Rio’s narrow and winding colonial streets (Meade, 1997). These urban reforms inaugurated three key characteristics that would recur in subsequent redevelopment projects in Rio: they followed a foreign model; they were intended to attract and aid the flow of capital into and through the city, in this case by turning its centre into a site of middle- and upper-class leisure; and, to this end, they were purposefully exclusionary.

Following these reforms, many of those expelled from the centre relocated to the more distant Cidade Nova (New City) (Figure 1), located inland from the city’s port area, where they were joined by further recent migrants from Brazil’s northeast and European immigrants. Roberto Moura (1995) and Bruno Carvalho (2018) argue that the relocation of these populations to this area precipitated the development of a subaltern popular culture in Rio. This centred around the houses of ‘aunts’ from the north-eastern state of Bahia, widely considered Brazil’s most African state, who acted as both cooks and priestesses of candomblé. Clustered around the Cidade Nova’s Praça Onze (Eleven Square), these houses welcomed both recent arrivals to the city and established residents, serving as ‘bastions of Afro-Brazilian spiritual, cultural, and social life’ (Carvalho, 2018: 82). Afro-Brazilian religion and musical genres thrived in and around these houses. Heitor dos Prazeres participated in the flourishing of Afro-Brazilian culture around Rio’s port area and Cidade Nova, leading him to designate them ‘Little Africa’.

Praça Onze was demolished and this community was dismantled, however, during modernising reforms to the area implemented by Getúlio Vargas (1883–1954) (Carvalho, 2018: 161–165). Connecting the Cidade Nova to the port, President Vargas Avenue was inaugurated in its place in 1944. Wide and lined with skyscrapers, it drew inspiration from Mussolini’s Via dell’Impero in Rome, from Hitler’s plans for a north–south axis across Berlin, and from Manhattan’s high-rise financial centre, all then considered to be in the vanguard of modernity. The avenue had various aims. Firstly, its centrepiece, Central Station, was the point of departure for a railway intended to facilitate the flow of goods and capital to and from Rio, the city’s hinterlands, and, ultimately, the rest of Brazil. Likewise, the avenue itself was intended as an artery, worthy of any country, along which automobiles could circulate and military parades could march. Secondly, the demolition of popular housing in this area and the displacement of its residents sought to hygienise and make way for real estate speculation. Thirdly, the monumental and utilitarian aesthetic of these reforms was intended to project the ideals of modernity and progress to replace what elites perceived as Rio’s culture of idleness and vagrancy with a strong work ethic. Echoing the 1903–1906 reforms, this avenue strove to compete with foreign models and to stimulate Rio’s economic development by facilitating the flow of goods and capital through the city and improving its population.

Following these reforms, a series of factors led the port area to decline. Firstly, Rio’s expansion southwards and westwards encouraged the area’s most affluent residents to relocate. Secondly, the rise of other ports in Brazil diverted business away from Rio. Thirdly, at a time when the Brazilian government sought to stimulate an internal automobile market to achieve economic progress and therefore invested heavily in roads, a raised highway inspired by New York’s Cross-Bronx Expressway and designed to connect Rio’s north and south zones, the Elevado de Perimetral, was inaugurated in 1960.

Many buildings were demolished to accommodate its supports, as the highway ran both through and over the port area, cutting it off from the rest of the city.

Contemporary Redevelopment in Rio de Janeiro's Port Area

Inspired by the success of Barcelona 2000, a strategic plan prepared by the Spanish city's council in the run-up to its hosting of the 1992 Olympic Games, a new wave of reforms swept Rio, beginning at the turn of the twenty-first century. In 1993, Rio's City Council developed a Strategic Plan for the City of Rio de Janeiro (Cocco, 2001). Central to this was the regeneration and transformation of the port area. In 2009, these plans crystallised under the name 'Marvellous Port', a play on 'Marvellous City', a common nickname for Rio that references the natural beauty of its landscape. Inspired by a now neoliberal agenda, these reforms again emulated a foreign model, in this case Barcelona, to accumulate capital through the selling of landscape complexes and property speculation (Smith, 2002: 443). They sought to attract flows of capital to the post-industrial area by improving its transport links and repurposing it as a site of middle and upper-class leisure through investment in improvements to the area's streetscape, the creation of space for new restaurants, businesses and housing, and the inauguration of the Museu de Arte do Rio (Rio Museum of Art) (MAR) and the Museum of Tomorrow (Figure 1).

Housed in a pre-existing building, the MAR has become a key site for community and cultural events in the port area and was where the three 'products' that record the Valongo Wharf Circle were launched. By contrast, residents and activists have criticised the purpose-built Museum of Tomorrow for being both disconnected from the area's rich and tragic history and embodying the exclusionary, modernising logics of redevelopment in the area. Indeed, racialised anxieties again inflected these reforms, manifest in sanitising attempts to manage lower-class, Afro-Brazilian communities considered criminal and a threat to public health (Garmany and Richmond, 2020). These logics led to widespread removals and have seen deadly security regimes installed across Rio that restrict and criminalise the movement of many through the city in order to facilitate the flow of capital.

Unlike previous reforms implemented in the area, however, heritage was key to these. José Reginaldo Santos Gonçalves (2007: 139–158) notes how early attempts to define a Brazilian national heritage emphasised architecture that would demonstrate the country to be a natural successor to classical civilisation and inspire national citizens in the present. In the 1970s, however, a more processual approach developed that elevated select aspects of everyday life to the status of heritage that could be used as 'cultural goods' to encourage economic development. Collins (2015: 102–140) adds that Brazil's neoliberal restructuring in the 1990s accelerated the mobilisation of heritage as a source of profit in the country. More recently, a global heritage boom, and the recognition of intangible practices as patrimony and instrumentalisation of heritage as economic development strategy by bodies such as UNESCO has also inflected Brazil's approach to patrimony. Indeed, today, across Brazil and the world, city planners develop heritage narratives to attract new visitors and residents to spend money in and extract capital from urban areas.

The celebration of the Portuguese and Catholic patrimony of Conceição Hill in Rio's port area exemplify this. Roberta Sampaio Guimarães (2014) notes how, in the late 1990s, urban planners determined that the top of the hill was noteworthy for its Portuguese architecture and should be preserved. They also concluded that the modern

architecture of the rest of the hill was not representative of the past, supposedly unoccupied and, therefore, ripe for redevelopment, disregarding local use and conceptions of the rest of the hill. The initiative ignored the existence and patrimony of other communities living on the hill and threatened them with removal. Guimarães's work both underscores how architectural and processual approaches to heritage that reify everyday lifeways coexist, and how the valorisation of the past and aspects of the everyday in redevelopment projects do not necessarily attenuate their negative consequences, such as displacement, and afford opportunities for new violence. Instead, because heritage organises the 'past as the life of a self-directing object' (Mitchell, 2002: 162), the selection of appealing, accessible and, therefore, profitable heritage narratives naturalises their inclusions and exclusions and disguises 'some of the arbitrariness, injustice, and coercion' (Mitchell, 2002: 147) on which they depend.

Resistance in Rio de Janeiro's Port Area

Those negatively affected by redevelopment in Rio have never passively accepted it, however. The period from 1889 to 1930, for example, was marked by community protest that targeted urban infrastructure intended for the rich that was denied to or negatively affected the poor (Meade, 1997). The epicentre of the 1904 Vaccine Revolt, during which residents of Rio's centre and port area protested forced vaccination against smallpox and related government bids to hygienise Rio, was only a stone's throw away from the Valongo Wharf.

More recently, those living in parts of Conceição Hill marked for redevelopment and facing removal contested this Portuguese account of the hill, stating it did not represent them. Guimarães (2013) recounts how residents of the Pedra do Sal (Salt Rock), located at the foot of the hill, have controversially employed a mythological narrative to claim the status of inheritors to Little Africa and seek land rights in order to avoid eviction due to property speculation. This strategy availed itself of multicultural, affirmative action legislation introduced in Brazil's 1988 Constitution, which afforded land rights to descendants of *quilombos*, or traditional Black communities, as a form of reparation for historical injustice. Such recognition depended upon a territorial survey carried out by academics, who, in this instance, drew heavily upon the book, *Tia Ciata e a Pequena África no Rio de Janeiro* (Aunt Ciata and Little Africa in Rio de Janeiro) (Moura, 1995) and its account of the development of subaltern, popular culture in Rio, foregrounding continuities between those living in and around Rio's port area at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In practice, however, many communities granted *quilombola* status, including that of the Pedra do Sal, remain locked in legal battles for land titles, especially where the interests of property speculation are involved, revealing the limits of such legislation.

These difficulties exemplify the tensions inherent in what Tim Ingold terms the 'genealogical model' through which multicultural and indigenous land claims are generally made:

[I]ndigenous peoples are the descendants of those who inhabited a country when colonists arrived from elsewhere. Yet while habitation of the land is taken to be the source of indigenous identity, the claim that this identity can be passed on by descent implies that it is no longer drawn from the land at all, but from one's genealogical ancestors. (Ingold, 2000: 12)

Here, Ingold highlights the impossible proofs of continuity and authenticity that this approach demands and how it disregards the complexities of the ways people inhabit their surroundings. This is especially relevant in places like Rio's port area where residents have been cleared in cycles of urban redevelopment and their history deliberately erased. Guimarães concludes that their attainment of land rights thus depends:

not only on their political and legal strategies, but on the resonance of their identity narratives and religious practices with society at large [...] their capacity to evoke cultural experiences regarded as 'authentic', despite the permanent social tension due to the space's other uses and practices. (Guimarães, 2013: 224)

As I explore through analysis of records of its activities, the Valongo Wharf Circle was imbricated into and intervened in this context of expropriative redevelopment in ways that both reproduce and break from the 'genealogical model'.

The Valongo Wharf Circle

The history of the Valongo Wharf and the emergence of the Valongo Wharf Circle are bound up in the processes of redevelopment outlined above. The original slaving docks were covered over and renamed 'Empress Wharf' in 1843 in preparation for the arrival of Teresa Cristina of the Two Sicilies before her wedding to Brazil's then Emperor, Dom Pedro II. The Empress Wharf was redeveloped during the 1903–1906 reforms and, to wipe away Brazil's imperial past and project the image of a modern nation worthy of investment, renamed 'Commerce Square'. Long hidden under these more recent urban interventions, the stones that comprised the original Valongo Wharf were uncovered in 2011, as archaeologists, aware of its location, 'rediscovered' the site during an archaeological survey of the area for the Marvellous Port project.

Following the affordance of multicultural recognition and rights to Afro-descendent communities in Brazil, and a growing international interest in the history and memory of the transatlantic slave trade, the 'rediscovery' of the Valongo Wharf and recognition of the Quilombo da Pedra do Sal necessitated a reorientation of the heritage narratives promulgated by the redevelopment project and brought the status of Rio's port area as Little Africa back into focus. This resulted in the creation of a Historical and Archaeological Circuit of Celebration of African Heritage in the port area in 2011, consisting of six sites and limited signage, which sought both to denounce the horrors of slavery and celebrate the port area's African heritage. The Valongo Wharf was also recognised as a World Heritage site by UNESCO in 2017. André Cicalo records the tensions and power imbalances between different actors involved in this process. These include criticism from Black activists that experts and officials leading the heritage-creation process were largely light-skinned (Cicalo, 2017: 8), and concern from residents and researchers that state-promoted slavery heritage was being used as a means to 'sweeten the pill of gentrification' in the port area (Cicalo, 2013: 178). Yet despite these processes, apart from limited initiatives such as the one through which the Valongo Wharf Circle was awarded funds, officials have for the most part offered neither financial support nor infrastructure to promote and enliven the port area's heritage.

Cicalo (2015) nonetheless observes that since its uncovering Valongo Wharf has been appropriated and enlivened by Black collectives, candomblé congregations, and tour

groups, among others, who have used it to explore Rio's past and present. He notes how this has led to a new focus on the legacies of the slave past that was previously considered disempowering. The Valongo Wharf Circle offers an early example of civil society-led attempts to animate Valongo Wharf. In *Roda dos Saberes do Cais do Valongo*, Mestre Carlão writes that the discovery of Valongo Wharf and its history 'ended up awakening a consciousness of, motivating interest in and generating the need to speak about what had happened especially in the area known from the beginning of the twentieth century as Little Africa' (Teobaldo, 2015: 13). He has also stated that he believed the practice of capoeira close to the Valongo Wharf would be an appropriate way to explore this history, given its Afro-Brazilian roots and historical ties to Rio's port area (interview with Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, 2015).

Capoeira is often regarded as having been wiped out in Rio by zealous policing at the turn of the twentieth century but as having survived in Salvador (Dias, 2001). Yet, analogously, African culture began to be positively reassessed across the globe and the search for the popular roots of a distinctly national culture began in Brazil. Simone Vassallo (2003) elucidates how, against this backdrop, from the 1930s onwards, *mestres* from Bahia moved their teaching from the street to academies with the support of prominent intellectuals and researchers. These intellectuals became arbiters of the practice, declaring Capoeira Angola more traditional and authentically African than Capoeira Regional, another prominent style, although Vassallo contests this. During this period capoeira underwent what Vassallo (2003) terms a 'pacification', through which it was transformed into a ludic, folkloric practice. Rehabilitated, it was then disseminated by these Bahian *mestres* and their disciples throughout Brazil and the world. Capoeira was recognised as Cultural Heritage of Brazil in 2008 and the capoeira circle was recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2014 by UNESCO. Underpinning these developments is a simultaneous recognition of capoeira as a mutable everyday practice that is valuable and representative of the Brazilian nation, and a traditional one at risk of loss or adulteration if not adequately safeguarded (Vassallo, 2003, 2008). Its official recognition has, nonetheless, also shaped the practice and granted it a global reach and appeal. Additionally, Assunção (2005: 196) notes that capoeira has become 'cool', a product in a context of 'competitive consumption of experience' that has been wound into and inflected by global flows of capital (Pountain and Robins, 2000: 166). It is in this context that the Valongo Wharf Circle used Capoeira Angola to intervene in Rio's port area between 2012 and 2016.

Over the years, the Valongo Wharf Circle, whilst retaining its critical stance, did make use of local authorities and the opportunities they provided. The project's 'products', for example, were created using funds from a prize granted by the company overseeing the Marvellous Port project. Nor were its activities uncontroversial, receiving criticism for the whiteness of some of its organisers, including Mestre Carlão, and participants, given its examination of the legacies of slavery and racial inequality. Indeed, whilst Mestre Carlão noted to me that the project ended because he left Brazil to pursue a PhD abroad, he added that the criticism he received precipitated this decision, as it led him to reflect that it was not right for a white man to occupy a 'leadership position in a space of African culture' (interview with Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, 2020).

Perceiving the Everyday

During the 1920s, positive revaluations of African culture internationally and the search for a national culture in Brazil gave birth to the discourse of 'racial democracy'. Key to this, Gilberto Freyre (1966) held that Brazil's history of racial mixing, far from being a source of degeneration and shame, had given birth to a happy and diverse people that was free from racism. Relatedly, it was during this period that select cultural practices such as samba were transformed from 'a preserve of the Afro-Brazilian descendants of slaves in Rio's poorer quarters to become a symbol of national self-definition, created and performed for and by a cross-section of the population' (Shaw, 2002: 81). Such redemptive accounts have been contested by activists and intellectuals such as Abdias do Nascimento (1989), who decried what Freyre regarded as a happy mixture as a sleight of hand that obscures the violence of Brazil's formative slavocracy and the persistence of racism in the country.

The legacies of this period have had an enduring impact on forms of Afro-Brazilian mobilisation in Brazil. Anthropologist Greg Downey (2005: 14) observes that whilst 'Afro-Brazilian groups that are predominantly political or activist have tended to remain small', cultural practices 'like funk dances or Afrocentric carnival groups' generate most enthusiasm. This is a source of chagrin among many Afro-Brazilian activists who 'often claim that the official embrace of the country's African heritage, ironically, has been a serious obstacle' (Downey, 2005: 13). Capoeira bears a complex relationship to this account. It sometimes serves as a national symbol of a mixed, non-racialist Brazil. Practitioners of Capoeira Angola, however, widely conceive of it as a form of Black resistance, a tool to raise awareness about Black culture and history and fight against domination and exclusion (Vassallo, 2008: 4). Vassallo notes that adepts who are not of Afro descent are welcome if they support these objectives. As critiques of Mestre Carlão's high profile in the port area demonstrate, however, considerable tension surrounds the correct way to practise Capoeira Angola and its relation to racial politics. This is compounded by how, as Cicalo (2017) shows in the context of Rio's port area, ideals of racial democracy often serve as a container for the recognition of multicultural difference. For example, officials frequently construe the region's African heritage as a building block of a racially mixed nation.

Concerns about such co-option and political neutralisation have generated dispute within the Capoeira Angola community about the impact of its official recognition as intangible heritage (Vassallo, 2008: 13). Nonetheless, several Knowledge Circles recorded in the book produced as part of the project, document and celebrate the process by which capoeira and the Valongo Wharf have been officially recognised (Teobaldo, 2015: 94–99, 108–115). Furthermore, Mestre Carlão was optimistic about the opportunity offered by such recognition to explore the port area's Afro-Brazilian heritage and history of racialised inequality (interview with Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, 2015).

The Knowledge Circle of funk musician MC Leonardo, which detailed his fight to establish the Association of Professionals and Friends of Funk and have funk recognised as culture by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro, exemplifies this. Funk, a musical genre, emerged in the 1980s when tapes and CDs from a variety of Black genres from the United States, such as soul, rhythm and blues, Motown, and hip-hop began to circulate in Rio's peripheries and attract huge crowds at dances. Funk has since acquired negative associations among Rio's middle and upper classes through its associations with Rio's denigrated favelas. Furthermore, as George Yúdice (2003:

118–123) explains, *arrastões* (rampages), in which young people from Rio's peripheries congregated on beaches in wealthy neighbourhoods of Rio and enjoyed funk music, cemented the genre's associations with violence and disorder. Therefore, unlike other select transatlantic Afro-Brazilian cultural practices that have been elevated to the status of cultural heritage, funk still experiences intense legislative and police repression.

In his Knowledge Circle, MC Leonardo spoke about the issue of heavy-handed policing in Rio, and, in particular, Pacifying Police Units installed in favelas across Rio prior to the city's hosting of sporting mega-events that were implemented under the guise of wresting these territories from parallel powers, returning them to the control of the state and establishing community policing. Nonetheless, the lethal tactics these units employ and their concentration in areas close to the hosting of sporting mega-events have raised questions about whether they aim to improve the lives of those living in favelas or simply contain and control them to aid the flow of capital (Freeman, 2012). MC Leonardo stated that in the favela:

all problems, even those unrelated to public security, have become problems for the police, and cultural events have been shut down. The Pacifying Police Units have ended what exactly in the favelas? Cultural entertainment. Nothing else. (Teobaldo, 2015: 90)

In this Knowledge Circle, therefore, the pretext of capoeira and its elevation from the everyday provided a platform for discussion of the selective valorisation of Afro-Brazilian culture and heavy-handed security policies in favelas to advocate for people's right to what they enjoy. Additionally, the Knowledge Circle led by Luiz Antônio Simas ruminated on iterations of Rio erased by redevelopment whose 'silence screams', to use his words (Teobaldo, 2015: 64). He stated:

[W]hen you look at Rio de Janeiro today in 2014, you don't see what this city was in 1905, 1910, because everything used to be jumbled together [...] there was no spatial notion of separating the port area from the Cidade Nova [...]. All of this was denominated Little Africa. (Teobaldo, 2015: 68)

Far from straightforwardly celebrating this lost Rio, however, he punctured the notion that it was harmonious and non-conflictual by emphasising:

the fabulous discomfort of thinking of a city that holds as its civilising heroes, who codified perhaps the greatest symbol of this city, Rio de Janeiro's samba, some guys who were trafficking marijuana, pimping women, dying of syphilis, dying in knife fights. (Teobaldo, 2015: 69)

These comments explored how early pioneers of samba such as Sílvio Fernandes and Ismael Silva were engaged in *malandragem*, or hustling, which has been mythologised and celebrated as a uniquely Brazilian means of navigating a hostile environment and material scarcity (Shaw, 2002). Simas's frank exposition of how these legendary figures got by, however, unsettled any sense of wistful romanticism. These observations led him to suggest that Rio sits on the frontier between 'horror and beauty, death and vitality' (Teobaldo, 2015: 69), of which capoeira offers another a key example:

few things are so powerfully metaphorical of this Rio de Janeiro as the unexpectedness of capoeira games. Especially that capoeira that is not martial, but certainly unexpected, in which you do not know where your body will

stop, because bodies from Rio de Janeiro can end up in a ditch, just as well as in bed. This is what Rio is, the city has this peculiarity and it unsettles as it is very difficult to think about it. (Teobaldo, 2015: 69–70)

In Simas's account, the elevation of samba and capoeira to the status of heritage offered opportunities to highlight the complex and murky textures of everyday life in Rio that are often elided in non-conflictual, one-nation accounts of Brazil and its heritage.

In her enquiry into the anthropology of the ordinary, chronic and cruddy, Elizabeth Povinelli (2011: 14) asks both, 'how can we simultaneously recognise that discourse makes objects appear, that it does so under different material conditions, and that the matter that matters forth from discourse is not identical to discourse?' and what techniques 'allow nonperceptual quasi-events to be transformed into perceptual events, even catastrophes?' These Knowledge Circles made a visible 'event' of different forms of violence resulting from the tragedy of Brazil's slavocracy and its legacy of ongoing racial inequality. Whilst police violence and crime often acquire spectacular dimensions that allow them to become media events, their treatment in these Knowledge Circles was more mundane and attentive to their impact on everyday practices. With this emphasis, neither phenomenon is easily synthesised, nor incorporated into celebratory accounts of the African heritage or redevelopment of Rio's port area. Nonetheless, in ways akin to Collins's argument that police efforts to demarcate and manage heritage spaces can produce an aura of authenticity and configure spaces as 'exotically exciting' (Collins, 2014: 478), in both MC Leonardo's and Luiz Antônio Simas's Knowledge Circles, the high profile of the Marvellous Port project, and the resistance it provoked, Capoeira Angola's status as both heritage and tool of Black resistance, and the Valongo Wharf Knowledge Circle's celebration of the port area's heritage provided opportunities for discussion that made issues of police violence and crime feel palpable and urgent.

Furthermore, the very idea for the Valongo Wharf Circle emerged from the rediscovery of the wharf itself, as that is what Mestre Carlão to explore the history of space in Rio's port area and the area's Afro-Brazilian heritage. He described how discussion of race and racism naturally flowed from this history (interview with Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, 2015). The project and its emphasis stemmed, therefore, from the ways in which meaning is dictated by what Karen Barad (2003) regards as a field of possibilities restricted by pre-existing discursive and material contexts of Rio's port area: urban reforms, the uncovering of the stones of the Valongo Wharf and racial discourse in Brazil. The project's events and products were then folded into the becoming of these material realities and discourses. Contributors to the Valongo Wharf Circle likewise seized upon the platform afforded by the project to explore political issues relating to Rio and its port area that diverge from the cultural events identified by Downey (2005) as generating widespread interest among Afro-Brazilian groups.

Tradition and Pleasure in Capoeira Angola

Alongside text, Buzanovsky's black and white photographs of the Valongo Wharf Circle's capoeira circles populate the pages of *Roda dos Saberes do Cais do Valongo*. Analysis of these images illuminates how bodies were important *loci* of the production of tradition and pleasure that allowed participants of the Valongo Wharf Circle to re-orientate themselves towards the instrumentalised space of Rio port area, both aspects of social projects that, as Yúdice (2003: 109) notes, are frequently overlooked.

The bodies in motion recorded in Buzanovsky's work necessitate reflection on the event's capoeira circle and the value afforded to it by its participants as a means of 'securing the continuity of the "historical memory" of Afro-Brazilians' (Vassallo, 2008: 4). In Capoeira Angola, this is produced and transmitted through the bodily practice of movements that are both carefully selected and passed down through *mestres* (de Castro, 2007). The practice's pursuit of authentic movement is, therefore, 'constantly reaffirmed and, for the most part, contradictory' (de Castro, 2007: 96), as it is through moments of 'improvisation, of spontaneity, of creation, certainly facilitated by the body's habit of making movements' that the past and tradition are staged (de Castro, 2007: 97). Capoeira Angola, therefore, bears a complex relation to Ingold's 'genealogical model', as its authenticity is actualised through embodied practice that is always unique and non-replicable.

Buzanovsky's images also capture members of the Valongo Wharf Circle singing and playing instruments. They illustrate how music and song combined with other elements of the Valongo Wharf Circle to offer participants a shared, embodied experience of being in Rio's port area that drew them into and encouraged them to reflect on the processes of historical and contemporary redevelopment and resistance remaking Rio's port area. Indeed, song is a constitutive part of all capoeira circles that allows the practice 'to be experienced fully in all its temporal depth' (Downey, 2005: 85), as 'capoeira songs with historical projections paint a vivid picture of the past' and 'suggest a stance for the listener doing the projecting to complete the song in experience' (Downey, 2005: 86).

The Valongo Wharf Circle's capoeira circle was not simply a means of honouring tradition, however, but a satisfying, pleasurable and sociable practice that attracted participants, as evidenced the alternately smiling and concentrated faces that populate Buzanovsky's photographs. Furthermore, although not evident in the images, the monthly event always rolled into 'a whole day of capoeira and socialisation', with participants eating and drinking together afterwards (interview with Carlo Alexandre Teixeira, 2020).

Conclusion

Elements of the Valongo Wharf Circle certainly sought change and advocated for a series of shifts in public policy, echoing traditional understandings of social movements. Nonetheless, many of its aspects indicate how its intervention was also based upon transformative occupation and exploration of the instrumentalised and contested space of Rio's port area. This latter characteristic of the Valongo Wharf Circle speaks to Povinelli's understanding of social projects as 'aggregating practices, incessantly fixing phenomena and cosubstantiating practices' (Povinelli, 2011: 8) that denaturalise the present by configuring it in new constellations. Indeed, in her view, social projects are complexly contingent and continually becoming, not fixed things, that draw our eye to our fractured present and materialise an 'otherwise', or, alternative way of being.

This offers an apt way of conceptualising the Valongo Wharf Circle's intervention in Rio's port area, which has long been shaped by cycles of exclusionary, modernising, sanitising and capital-orientated redevelopment. The project's use and celebration of a wharf revealed during urban reforms, the elevation of select Afro-Brazilian practices and aspects of the port area's built environment to the status of national heritage, and redevelopment-related funding drew it into flows of capital. Its emphasis upon occupation, exploration and pleasure, however, disaggregated and disrupted the exclusionary

future-orientated justifications sustaining these cycles of redevelopment: once a month, on a Saturday morning, between 2012 and 2016, the Valongo Wharf Circle used forms of heritage, formerly everyday sites and practices, to bring other everyday concerns and forms of violence into focus; to materialise erasures from its past; to occupy, re-purpose and explore ways of being in the port area not motivated by or reducible to the extraction of capital; and to re-animate an otherwise carefully managed, inscrutable heritage site for the event's participants. Although the project's monthly events have now ended, the 'products' that supplemented them continue to circulate and contribute to understandings of Rio's port area.

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